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EXALTING THE KING AND OBSTRUCTING THE STATE: A POLITICAL INTERPRETATION OF ROYAL RITUAL IN BASTAR DISTRICT, CENTRAL INDIA*

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This article offers an interpretation of tribalism in peninsular India based on the political and economic characteristics of 'tribal' kingdoms presided over by 'Hindu' kings. These kingdoms were markedly egalitarian with a relatively direct relationship obtaining between the ruler and his tribal subjects, unmediated by the layers of officialdom characteristic of neighbouring Hindu and Muslim kingdoms. This has been typically explained as an evolutionary and historical consequence of 'primitivism' reinforced by physical isolation and the operation of exclusionary criteria by Hindu society. However, this article argues that tribals have had more of an upper hand in negotiating status than is hitherto suspected and employs Appadurai's concept of 'coercive subordination' to re-examine Hindu/tribal relations. By enacting an image of themselves as volatile, forest-dwelling primitives, the tribals ensured their relative freedom from state interference and inhibited the development of revenue-extracting institutions, in turn ensuring a state weak in secular function but ritualistically exalted. This is demonstrated by an analysis of the symbolism of the annual Dasara ritual in the old kingdom of Bastar, during which the Hindu king is subjected to an 'abduction' by the tribal rabble before his confirmation as divine ruler. Such rituals suggest a fresh interpretation be given to the so-called tribal rebellions of 1876, 1910 and 1961 which occurred in the kingdom of Bastar.

Why were there – why are there – 'tribal' societies in peninsular India? India's 'tribals' (or Adivasis) are not really tribes (i.e. ethnic groups) at all, but are numerically dominant agricultural castes which hold, or used to hold, land in clan-based village communities in the more remote, forested and hilly parts of the subcontinent. The puzzle exists because, except in tribal areas, Indian rural society has a characteristic layered caste/class structure which failed to develop fully in the statelets, or so-called 'Jungle Kingdoms', with tribal majorities (Schneepel in press: 3). Traditionally, Indian rural society was founded on the twin pillars of landlordism and officialdom; that is, the extraction of rents and land-revenue from the peasant masses by high castes. In the 'Jungle Kingdoms', while they were able to maintain themselves intact, revenue extraction was underdeveloped. There were no layers of greater and lesser landlords between the 'tribal' cultivator and the Raja at the apex of the kingdom. In the tribal areas society was, so to speak, two-dimensionally hierarchical, founded on a stark opposition between the mass of ordinary subjects

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(the tribes) and the King and his court. By contrast, the more developed type of traditional kingdoms (known in the literature as 'little kingdoms') were three-dimensionally hierarchical in that a dense screen of social barriers and material relationships of clientship and extraction intervened between the very high and the very low, creating the minutely nuanced, infinitely graduated social hierarchy most students of Indian society recognize today.

The most common explanation advanced for the peculiar social features of 'tribal' areas in peninsular India or 'jungle kingdoms' – their hierarchical 'flatness' if I may phrase it so – has been historico-ecological. Three-dimensional hierarchy failed to develop in these areas because they were physically remote and unattractive, away from the major lines of communication, too poor and unproductive to be tempting to powerful kings who could have installed and protected a landlord/official class. The tribes are primitive folk who have simply never been given the historical opportunity to become an ordinary Hindu peasantry, as they would have under more 'favourable' circumstances. Either that or, due to centuries of neglect, they must have degenerated. But as anyone who has travelled in peninsular India knows, socially remote regions of the peninsula are not necessarily circumscribed by formidable geographic barriers. This is particularly true of the largest and most famous of the 'Jungle kingdoms' of central India, the princely state of Bastar, the kingdom I wish to discuss in detail in this article.

Most of Bastar, an area the size of Belgium, is, in fact, relatively flat and such hilly areas as exist there are no more formidable than in other regions of the subcontinent which have been under the sway of fully developed state systems for millennia. Something more than a reflex explanation based on geography seems called for. In Bastar some additional ideological or structural restraint on the consolidation of landlordism and clientage seems to have inhibited the internal differentiation of the state over a long period. In this article I am going to canvass a political and ideological explanation for the development of the kingdom of Bastar in its particularly hypertrophied 'tribal' form.¹

Bastar State, now a mere district (*zilla*) of the post-Independence state of Madhya Pradesh was, until 1947, the largest of the Princely States predominantly populated by offshoots of the great 'Gond' tribe, of which there are a cluster in south-eastern Madhya Pradesh and highland Orissa. My thesis is that the political characteristics of the kingdom of Bastar were the result of a distinct political strategy effected by the tribal Gond people of Bastar. It was the tribal people who kept the state 'two-dimensional'; and the means through which they achieved this (for them) desirable political outcome was, paradoxically, the cult of the Raja of Bastar as a divine ruler. I am going to argue that the ritual relations between Raja and people constituted a bulwark against the rationalization of the polity in Bastar. Moreover, as I will describe, the people of Bastar periodically rebelled against the Government when their ritual relationship with the Raja was deemed to be under threat. During the most recent of these rebellions, in 1966, Pravir, the last ruler of Bastar, died in a gun-battle with police at the royal palace in Jagdalpur, thus finally bringing to an end the history of Bastar state.

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An appearance of poverty and primitiveness is an important weapon in the peasants' battle to keep exploitation by overlords at bay. Bastar has always appeared to be one of the poorest places in India, and is still believed to be so by those who have mostly never been there and especially who have not drunk and feasted regularly in tribal houses, as I have. Perhaps the time has come to ask whether 'tribal society' in India, in Bastar particularly, is not so much a relic of bygone centuries as rent- and tax-minimization on a huge, indeed civilizational, scale. While the kingdom of Bastar was in existence, the tribal population enjoyed the benefit of their extensive lands and forests with a degree of non-exploitation from outside which would hardly be matched anywhere else in peninsular India.² The capacity of the Bastar ruler and members of the Hindu elite around him to extract land revenue, even from areas relatively close to the capital, was a fraction of the extractive capacity of even a third-rate Raja in more civilized parts of India (Sunder 1994: 137).

Let me insert a few facts and figures here just to show what I mean. Even in the 1940s, when British power in India was at its height, the total revenues of Bastar state, from all sources, only amounted to about two rupees per head per year, a very low figure indeed. A similar picture of wholesale under-extraction of revenue by the state in Bastar can be traced back to the nineteenth century (see Sunder 1994: chs. 5-6).

From the 1860s, under British tutelage, the Raja of Bastar, whose finances were notoriously chaotic, embarked on a series of taxation reforms designed to increase his income. From 1868, tax farmers (*malguzars*) were allocated blocs of villages from which tax was to be raised at a notional rate of two and a quarter rupees per plough. Some revenue was raised from village headmen by sending parties of soldiers and an elephant to the villages nearer the capital, but revenue-raising was very sporadic at the best of times because of the wildness of the country. Even the official figures for expected state revenue reveal that in the period around 1906 land revenue ranged between one-half and one-quarter of a rupee per head per annum, much of which probably remained uncollected. Let us just contrast this picture with that prevailing in 'modernized' parts of India at the same time. On the basis of some figures provided for 1905-6 by Jayati Ghosh (pers. comm., 1996) the per capita revenue (or rent) payments of peasants in Uttar Pradesh, on the same basis, would have been about three rupees per head per annum, which was collected more or less in full – i.e. six or twelve times as much. It seems reasonable to conclude that turn-of-the-century Bastar peasants worked very much less hard, and kept very much more of the fruits of their labour, than was typical of the peasants elsewhere in India at the time.

Bastar state evidently lacked the leverage over the ordinary cultivators to raise levels of revenue extraction significantly, despite official attempts to do so. The Bastar rural power-vacuum was the consequence of the social characteristics of the indigenous population, who long preserved an image of 'wildness' totally at odds with their lack of military organization or political leadership. It was not that the wild tribes could resist the imposition of power – they were in fact generally very docile – but that they seemed to slip through the meshes of power, a protean mass motivated by unpredictable impulses inaccessible to civilized reason. Too primitive to be governed, they could only be preyed upon by small

men (grubby *malguzars*, traders, money-lenders), but not by an established ruling class.

The main royal ritual of the Bastar state, Dasara, was part of the process through which the Bastar power-vacuum was created and sustained. The ritual created the public impression (a true impression, though partial) that the Raja of Bastar was fanatically worshipped by his subjects and that he was a powerful ruler who could not be politically challenged. Dasara was a massive ritual event which played a key role in preserving Bastar as a large, unified, kingdom. Despite the size of the kingdom and the lack of roads, tribal people from all over the state regularly made their way on foot to the capital for the annual event, where they encamped for the duration, forming a great multitude who were both armed (with axes and bows and arrows) and in a very excitable condition. These multitudes attending Dasara, which was a religious festival celebrating many tribal gods as well as the 'State' mother-goddess, Danteshwari, were, from one point of view, only the Raja's most loyal subjects, unanimously demonstrating their subservience and worship to their lord. But from another point of view they were 'the people' assembled and unified, demonstrating their potential political muscle.³

We have here, I think, an instance on a mass scale of what Appadurai (1990) has recently identified as a basic strategy in Indian interpersonal relations between superiors and subordinates. I am referring to what he calls 'coercive subordination' (1990: 97 sqq.) in the context of his brilliant analysis of the use of praise as a means of social control in Indian civilization. Coercive subordination, or ritualized coercive deference, are techniques through which the subordinate so flatters the superior that the superior must accede to the inferior's demands or risk loss of status. In the course of Dasara, the people of Bastar imprisoned their Raja (literally, as we will see) in a close embrace of worship which both exalted and neutralized him and which made the power-vacuum possible, in that the whole mechanism of state was made to revolve around the divine ruler, yet the divine ruler himself was made 'by acclamation' of the people, by their praise.

Besides looking at the politico-religious implications of Dasara there is another angle of approach to the Bastar power-vacuum which I want to take simultaneously. When Bastar state is written about, two themes dominate: one is Dasara, the other the periodic eruption of 'tribal rebellions', of which the last was the one in 1966 which saw the state finally collapse. Previous tribal rebellions took place in Bastar in the years 1876, 1910 and 1961. The usual approach taken to these rebellions is to try to interpret them as popular uprisings by 'the poor' against abuses committed by the rich and powerful: that is, to assimilate them as far as possible to revolutionary mass-action as understood in the West (see Anderson & Huber 1988; Sunder 1994). But if it is true, as I would steadfastly maintain, that the people of Bastar had less to complain about in terms of restrictions on access to land, water and forest than almost any rural population in India, and were less taxed, why should these popular uprisings have occurred? Rather than seeing these uprisings in the way in which they were seen by anxious British political agents, and are still seen today by historians, as tribal reactions to state oppression, I prefer to see them instead as a parallel mechanism, along with Dasara and the religious cult of the Raja, to ensure that

oppression was actually minimal because the country was thought to be filled with ungovernable primitive tribes. They were all, in other words, pre-emptive, designed to head off a feared outcome rather than protest about actual abuses. In each case the 'feared outcome' was the disruption of the all-important relationship between the Raja and his subjects by an over-mighty Prime Minister (*Diwan*), or later the Indian government. The symbolic mechanism in all of these uprisings was the same; i.e. the assertion of tribal control over the Raja's person and, through him, the capacity to resist the extension of the power of the state. As I will show, the rebellions of 1876, 1910 and 1961 actually succeeded to some extent in securing the position of the tribal population of Bastar, even if they did not achieve their ostensible aims at the time, and only the unrest of 1966 must be judged a failure.

I argue that 'pre-emptive unrest' has the same logical structure as calendrical ritual, which is also pre-emptive in the sense that calendrical rites assure a 'happy normality' against the possibility of adverse alterations in the order of things prescribed by God. Ritual is conservative, against change; so too were the Bastar rebellions. In fact, just as I have suggested that the Dasara celebrations had a political side to them in representing the unity of the people in a most unambiguous way, so, from the opposite side, I want to suggest that the notorious Bastar rebellions were enactments of the ritual relationships expressed in Dasara, but in an ostensibly secular-political mode.

However, let me turn to some of the ethnography and history which supports these assertions. The first matter to be dealt with is the format of the Bastar rites of Dasara and the status of the state goddess, Danteshwari.

According to legend, the Rajas of Bastar owe their position to their possession of the sword of Danteshwari, which was brought to Bastar by the first of the line, Annam Deo, in the fourteenth century from the kingdom of Warangal, whence they came in flight from Muslim invaders. They were accepted by the wild tribes of Bastar as rulers and the sword gives them the status of sacrificers and priests of Danteshwari, whom Hindus generally see as a form of the Hindu goddess Durga. They established the temple of Danteshwari at Dantewara and founded their capital at Bastar village, and later at Jagdalpur.

However, although the ruling family can claim to have introduced the cult of Durga/Danteshwari into Bastar, the legitimacy of their rule depends on the fact that Danteshwari has been assimilated to the generic tribal mother goddess, of whom there is a wide variety of local forms. It was (and is) taken for granted by tribal people that in sacrificing to Danteshwari the rulers were sacrificing to the autochthonous forms of the goddess, to whom local village priests (*Pujaris*) also sacrifice at seasonal festivals. The process of the Hinduization of 'tribal' divinities as part of the legitimacy-creating ideology of rulers has been subjected to much study in neighbouring Orissa, particularly in relation to the cult of Jagannath in Puri but also in relation, more recently, to the smaller divinities of the 'Jungle Kingdoms' of the Orissa Ghats (Kulke 1984; Schnepel 1994). The Bastar kingdom fits the pattern established in the jungle kingdoms of Orissa in every respect. It seems to me, though, that interpreting the cult of Danteshwari/Durga as the Hinduization of local divinities is only half the story. It is equally valid to

interpret Durga, as Danteshwari, as being subjected to 'tribalization' so as to lose her Hindu attributes and gain tribal ones, particularly the attribute of being represented, not as an image but 'in person' through possessing a human 'vehicle'. There is scope for changes in perspective when viewing the State goddess: for the Raja, and especially the Brahmins he patronized, she may indeed have been Durga, but for the masses Danteshwari was a magnified but still recognizable version of every local village goddess.⁴

The Dasara ritual was inaugurated by the lowest caste, the Mahars (weavers), who selected a young girl of seven or so to act as the medium through which the Goddess spoke, in the Raja's presence, sanctioning the performance of the ritual and enjoining that it proceed smoothly. The child-shaman uttered the Goddess's words while being swung on a ritual swing, as the Raja would be very much later on; though her swing seat was decked with thorns, his with cushions.

A notable point is that during Dasara the Raja had to abdicate and formally hand over his power, for the liminal period, to his Prime Minister, to resume it again (with the blessing of the Goddess) once Dasara was over. In this ritual of state, during which the Raja performed his quintessential functions of honouring the divinities and performing sacrifices, he was not a ruler at all but a renouncer. He could not wear rich attire, or shoes, or eat meat, and he had to sleep on the floor. He could not greet or be greeted by anyone during this period, as if he were a non-person. He could not ride in any vehicle except, of course, the *rath* (chariot) on which he was seated on certain days to be paraded around the town.

Not only did the Raja abdicate temporal power, he was also substituted for, in his temporary role as renouncer, by a stand-in who performed austerities on his behalf. The role of stand-in Raja was taken by a Halba of the 'Jogi' subcaste. For this man, a pit was dug in the *darbar* (court-assembly) hall, 6 ft long, 3 ft wide and 1 ft deep. The stand-in was seated on a heap of ashes, covered by a cloth, at one end of the pit, while at the other were placed a pot of water, a heap of grain and a sword (auspicious objects). The Jogi had to remain fasting in the pit for the whole of the nine nights (*navratri*) of Dasara, without moving, and to ensure this a plank was secured over his thighs while another plank was placed vertically behind his back, against which he could lean.

From the third day of Dasara the Raja began daily rides around the capital on his chariot, derived from those in use in Puri for the cult of Jaganath, though only having eight wheels rather than sixteen, the streets of Jagdalpur being too small to accommodate anything bigger.⁵ The massive (20 ft tall) chariot, with its solid wheels, adorned with banners, canopies and carved horsemen, was dragged around a set route by large teams of Gond and Dhurwa tribals who pulled on the ropes, urged on by the crowds of spectators. From the third to the ninth day of Dasara the programme essentially was the same; i.e. daily rounds by the Raja to perform worship (*puja*) at the Danteshwari shrine in the Jagdalpur palace compound and the shrines of other local gods situated in the immediate vicinity, plus chariot processions through the town. The eighth night was occupied with the religiously most significant ceremonies to appease

Danteshwari, in the palace and, later on, in a garden where the Raja remained until dawn. On the following day, nine unmarried women were worshipped, being given food and clothing (*Kumari puja*), after which the Brahmins who had assisted at the ceremonies were given presents and the Raja himself ate a dish of rice supposedly from the new season's crop.

In the evening Dasara 'proper' came to an end with the arrival at the palace of the *doli* (palanquin) in which the image of Danteshwari was contained, from her temple at Dantewara 60 km distant. The Raja proceeded to the edge of town (not far as Jagdalpur was no metropolis) where he shouldered one end of the pole on which the *doli* of the goddess was suspended, the other being taken by the chief priest from Dantewara. Together, they bore the goddess to the palace. Meanwhile, the Halba stand-in was released from his pit, and in former times he was at this point allowed to loot the bazaar with impunity, before making himself scarce, since it was imperative that he and the Raja should never set eyes on one another. (Later it became customary to reward him with ornaments or money.) The Raja at this point resumed his royal attire and was enthroned as secular ruler once more in the durbar hall, beside Danteshwari whose *doli* was placed on a separate throne. He received tribute and presents from his court and officials. That night, the Raja was paraded through the town on the chariot before a huge crowd, eventually returning to his private apartments.

In any properly conducted little kingdom, one would have thought, that would have been the end of Dasara, but not in Bastar; for on this and the ensuing night there took place what seem to me the most interesting events of this already quite interesting series. During the eleventh night it was customary for the Raja to be 'abducted' by tribals and to be borne off in a palanquin (i.e. a large *doli*) to a spot two miles to the south east of Jagdalpur, where the multitudes of Gonds (Maria and Muria) customarily encamped. Here he remained over the next night, being entertained by his tribal subjects who undertook a ritual hunt and who plied him with wild meats (and I suspect, though the sources do not confirm this, liquor). He was offered grain and money. Finally, on the following afternoon, he was brought back in triumph on his chariot before a massive and exceptionally excited crowd. Here is a contemporary description from the 1911 census of India:

In the evening amidst a huge concourse of people the chief seated on the big Rath [chariot] is dragged slowly towards the town. He is dressed in a yellow robe and carries a bow and arrows and is seated on a swing chair suspended from the roof of the Rath. Buffaloes are sacrificed in front of the Rath. Till fifteen years ago, buffaloes were thrown in front of the Rath and crushed to death, but this was stopped by the Administrator of that time. On this day all the people congregate on the large *maidan* [common ground] to the east of the town, to view the Rath. The place is crowded with villagers and their children all dressed in their brightest colours. Bands of Murias armed with bows and arrows rush about amidst the crowd shrieking out their war cries and every now and then capturing men to help drag the Rath along. A small cannon is dragged along and fired at intervals and hundreds of dhols, or tomtoms, and native musical instruments complete the Babel of sound. By the time the Rath enters the town it is dark and the houses and road are all illuminated with lamps, and fireworks are let off at intervals (Census of India 1911: 86).

Upon arrival, the Raja prostrated himself before Danteshwari. After this he was seated on his throne and salt and mustard were scattered around him to drive off evil spirits. The following day the ceremony ended.

It will be apparent that Bastar Dasara falls into two distinct segments: the first ten days (and nights) conform to the conventional temporal organization of Dasara. The second segment, occurring once the Raja has ostensibly resumed both secular and religious authority over the state, consists of the abduction of the Raja from his capital by the people and his triumphant return thither on the chariot. Let me begin by offering some remarks about the first segment of Bastar Dasara, the period of the Raja's 'abdication'.

During this period the kingship goes into temporary eclipse. Let us recall that Dasara takes place after harvest-time, at the point of transition between the Old (agricultural) Year and the New Year. Old enterprises must come to an end before Dasara and new enterprises may commence once Dasara is over. Dasara marks a liminal period, time out of time. Even in Hindu terms, the Raja's abdication and assumption of the role of a renouncer signify a little death in that renouncers are classically 'dead' in shedding worldly attachments. However, the point is much more graphically underscored through the institution of the stand-in renouncer-King, the Halba Jogi.

This man is clearly dead, seated on his heap of ashes. However, from the tribal point of view it would be the pit rather than the ashes which would convey the message, since the Gond people bury, rather than cremate, their dead. The pit in the durbar hall is a grave. The objects in the stand-in Raja's grave are symbolic of the death/rebirth cycle of agricultural operations which bring together four factors: seed, water, ashes and iron. The sword is the ploughshare (or steel-tipped digging stick) and the harvester's sickle; the seed is seed, the pot of water is rain, and the ashes are the ashes which fertilize fields (produced by firing the bush in the making of swidden fields).

Here I may make my bow to Frazer, if only in passing. The most tentative Frazerian can appreciate the symbolism of the Bastar Raja's death and rebirth, mirroring the cycle of natural fertility. However, there is another, no less Frazerian, aspect of the situation which demands mention. Initially, British interest in the affairs of Bastar were partly motivated by the desire to stamp out the human sacrifices of which the Raja of Bastar was believed to be guilty in large numbers. Since Grigson (1938), no serious student of Bastar has given any credence to these rumoured human sacrifices, which were no more than politically motivated slurs on the ruling family. Nonetheless, although there is no evidence for the actual practice of human sacrifice in Bastar, it would be wrong, I think, to imagine that the 'idea' of human sacrifice is not part of the indigenous repertoire of symbolic forms, a mere red herring introduced by the British to justify sweeping Bastar into the colonial embrace. We are, I think, entitled to interpret the stand-in Raja as a sacrificial victim, though there is not the least suggestion that he would be sacrificed. One telling point, here, is the way in which his reward for undertaking the Raja's austerities was to be permitted to loot the bazaar with impunity once he was released. As a 'dead' non-person, he could not commit any crime; it was as if he had passed out of existence.

More evidence for this line of thought was assembled by the Indologist Crooke, who, not surprisingly, gave the Bastar ceremonies pride of place in his comparative essay on the subject of Dasara (1915: 28-59). He points out the similarity between the Bastar substitute Raja and the equivalent personage in the Dasara rites of the neighbouring 'Jungle Kingdom' of Jeypore (Orissa).⁶ F.

Fawcett provided Crooke with a description of the role of 'sacrificial victim' in Jeypore:

A man representing the victim for the sacrifice was, from the day of the new moon; immured in a cage-like box in a shed especially erected for this purpose during the nine days of the festival. In front of this was kept a lamp, which was kept alight without intermission, and beside it was placed a sword daubed with sandalwood paste and decorated with flowers. While in the cage, the man neither ate nor drank, nor might he sneeze; it was said that even the ordinary functions of nature were denied him during his confinement (Crooke 1915: 34-5).

On the ninth day a sheep was sacrificed in the man's stead, after having its head shaved and being marked on the forehead with a red spot 'as used to be done in the case of human victims'. Once the sheep had been beheaded, its blood was offered to the Goddess (Kali). The surrogate sacrifice once completed, the man was given money and told to depart at once (Crooke 1915: 35).

It will be seen that the substitute Raja in the Bastar ceremonies can plausibly be interpreted in a number of different frames of reference: he is both an ascetic renouncer, an embodiment of the natural-cum-agricultural cycle of death and rebirth, a human sacrifice (implicitly of the Raja himself) for the benefit of the realm, and a scapegoat who does penance for the Raja's sins and who receives loot or presents and money to bear them away. It does not seem exaggerated to interpret all this in terms of 'the Dying God' as Frazer's contemporary and colleague, Crooke, did. I would certainly endorse a Frazerian interpretation myself.

If this is acceptable, then one can identify the basic scenario of Bastar Dasara as the ritual death and rebirth of the Raja, at the moment of the renewal of the year. The person of the Raja is identified with the cycle of natural regeneration which dominates the agricultural year. But the naturalization of the Raja itself involves a marked derogation of the kingly way of life, in the sense that it is no business of kings, normally speaking, to die and be reborn: their role is to make war, rule kingdoms and perform sacrifices. The Bastar Raja, as we saw, abandoned secular power for the period of his little death; but at the same time he performed kingly sacrificial functions during Dasara proper, in his own person.

In effect, what happens during this time is a splitting of the Raja into two persons: a sacrificed king (the stand-in), and a sacrificing king, who rides around the town on the chariot and worships at the various temples in the capital, including those shrines dedicated to tribal divinities who demanded blood sacrifices in which he assisted. At the same time the cross-identity between these two *personae* is underlined by the fact that the stand-in Raja occupies the assembly hall to the exclusion of the real Raja for this period, while the real Raja maintains the dress and life-style of a renouncer.

The net result is that the Raja sacrifices himself, as ascetics do, but is revived and reinstalled in his true role as secular Raja, 'clad in purple and red, decked with all jewels and ornaments' (Majumdar 1939: 164) by the agency of Danteshwari, his personal deity, on her arrival from Dantewara. If, as modern scholarship suggests, Danteshwari as state goddess is a 'Hinduized' version of the local mother Goddess, the implication would naturally be that it is by the grace of this local Goddess that the Raja of Bastar is able to rule over his kingdom. The ruler's authority rests on the support, if not of 'the people' then of their Goddess, which really amounts to the same thing. At the same time, if Danteshwari is a foreign (high, Hindu) goddess, who, like the Raja's ancestors, has come

from afar and settled in the country (becoming naturalized and tribalized in the process), then the implication is that the prosperity of the ruler and the kingdom depends on the capacity of the Raja, as sacrificer, to mediate with 'the outside' (beyond, above, outside the compass of the Raja's ordinary subjects). The Raja is a 'stranger King', as indeed is made explicit in the legendary foreign origins of the royal house. My own contention would be that both of the above interpretations are simultaneously made, and indeed it is precisely the function of ritual to obviate the contradiction between them. Danteshwari is both foreign and local, the Raja is both a mediator with the outside and the vehicle of the Goddess of the *bhum*, the land and the people. As Bloch (1991) has noted, the very essence of ritual thought is to be able to play both ends against the middle.

However, the revival or regeneration of the kingship which occurs on the tenth night of Bastar Dasara, via the agency of Danteshwari, is, as we have already noted, not definitive. The second segment of Dasara (which in a sense is not part of Dasara at all but an additional rite) consists of the abduction of the Raja on the eleventh night, his overnight sojourn in the tribal encampment, his feasting on wild food and his triumphal return.

This sequence enacts the appropriation by the tribes of their Raja, whose power is derived from 'outside', and his own deity Danteshwari, and their tribalization of him, through commensality. During the return journey he is Danteshwari in person, now a tribal deity. Thus the abduction of the Raja in a palanquin makes an explicit reference, I think, to the fact that the image of Danteshwari makes its way from Dantewara to Jagdalpur in a similar palanquin. The confinement of the Raja in a palanquin and his carrying-off in this manner, thus begins a sequence in which the Raja himself ceases to figure either as a renouncer or a sacrificer, but as an incarnation of the Goddess.

However, equally important was the 'domestication' of the Raja by the tribals through his eating of their food, especially the wild game they hunted. Of course, the Raja, as a Rajput, was in no way forbidden by caste from eating meat. But a certain derogation seems to be implied in a Rajput taking cooked food from Shudras, which is what the Bastar Gonds technically are, despite their beef-eating. The key symbolic act was not the Raja's meat-eating as such, but the provision of the meat by the tribal people who fed their ruler as 'hosts' and thus implicitly established a lien on him.

In offering meat (and liquor) to the Raja the tribals were doing two things: first of all the Raja was being brought down to the tribal level through a shared meal, being anchored to the middle world (*nadum bhum*) through sharing in the basic experience of this world which, in the estimation of tribals, is *girda* (enjoyment). At the same time, the Raja was being turned into a God(-dess) because offering meat, liquor and money (silver) is exactly what the tribals do to the *pen* (gods and goddesses) during the visitations of the divinities to the villages during *pen karsana* (village festival honouring the local deities). After the offerings, the villagers start to wrangle with the gods, explaining their grievances to them, just as I am sure they did to the Raja at this time.

But let us pause for a moment here and ask why the Raja submitted to these proceedings (abduction, feasting) given that he had just been resoundingly

confirmed, by the Goddess, as ruler? Was this the price he had to pay to secure the political support of the tribal people? But support against whom? And what support might he expect from a rabble who would, in a short while, disperse to their villages? However much *a posteriori* analysis might suggest that these transactions established a political pact between ruler and people, it would be quite incorrect to suppose that the Raja was consciously submitting to being placed on his throne by the exited tribal mob even if such may appear to be the case objectively.

The Raja and his circle could only sanction these proceedings by mythologizing them in a way which secured their conformity to a Rajput model. May, the writer of the report on Bastar Dasara published in the 1911 census, says that the episode of the abduction of the Raja, and his triumphal return, enacts 'the abduction of Rama and his return after fourteen years' sojourn in the jungles to his capital of Ajodhya' (Census of India 1911: 86). It was quite common in India for festivals for Durga to be followed immediately by ceremonies in which the king assumed the identity of the Hindu god Rama, as was evidently the case in Bastar. Fuller (1992: 108 sqq.), in a recent comparative discussion, has emphasized the centrality of military and warlike symbolism in these ceremonies of kingship. Commonly, the Raja worshipped his weapons at this time (as did the Bastar Raja on his return from the final procession) and ceremonially embarked on a campaign. Dasara does indeed mark the season, after the monsoons, during which kings might initiate military operations to expand their kingdoms, though we have no record of the Raja of Bastar having done so – his kingdom was, if anything, already too big. But, comparing Bastar with Fuller's 'military-expansionist' model of Dasara, one encounters an odd discrepancy between Bastar Dasara and the Dasara ceremonies of the more 'advanced' kingdoms (Mewar, Mysore, Dewas Senior, etc.) Fuller describes. In every case (except Bastar) what was ritually enacted in Dasara was the Raja's 'departure' for war; and this is logical because following Dasara is the time for beginning enterprises, not concluding them, as we have already seen. Bastar Dasara, as 'Rama's return to Ayodhya' was Dasara-in-reverse. Politically and historically, this corresponds to the fact that, far from being an 'expansionist' kingdom ruled by an ambitious monarch, Bastar was not a military power of any consequence. Rather, the kingdom was a place of sanctuary for a refugee king protected by Danteshwari's sword from outside interference, but not one to wield it outside Bastar's borders. The political 'introversion' of Bastar state was subtly encoded in the inversion of the normally expansive symbolism of Dasara, even though the Raja projects, at one level, the identity of Rama, the great warrior-king. Nothing could be less warlike than the Bastar Raja's abduction from the palace on the eleventh night; for he was, supposedly, fast asleep in the cradle-like palanquin as he was conveyed by the tribals to their jungle encampment. He was not departing for war but snoozing in his palanquin. Nor, subsequently, did he 'defeat' any identifiable enemy, fire arrows, or perform warlike acts. He simply 'returned in triumph' to his palace, at the head of an 'army' of tribals who were plainly his supporters, not his defeated enemies.

In other words, the Rajput model was inverted in Bastar so that, while remaining a 'warrior king', the Bastar Raja merely regained his *own* kingdom, rather than divesting rival kings of theirs. In this way, an accommodation was

achieved between the 'courtly' perspective on Dasara, in which the Raja must figure as an autonomously powerful warrior king, and the demotic perspective in which the Raja was placed on his throne by his subjects, while impersonating 'their' goddess. I do not think that the identity between the Raja and Rama played an important part in tribal perceptions of the culmination of Bastar Dasara. From the tribal point of view, the primary identification of the Raja at this time was with his own personal Goddess, Danteshwari, who, even as Durga, belongs in a quite separate category from Rama.⁷

The most important physical symbol of the Raja's ritual status during the culminating episode of Dasara (the return to the capital on the chariot) was the placement of the Raja on a swing – the swing which was suspended from the roof of the chariot on this occasion only. It will be recalled that the very *first* episode of Bastar Dasara was the possession of the juvenile Mahar girl by Danteshwari. This girl-shaman, from the very lowest caste, was swung, to induce possession, on a bed of thorns. The very *last* episode is the swinging of the Raja himself on the swing mounted on the chariot, a luxury swing rather than a thorny one.

I suggest the following interpretation of the contrast between the thorny swing and the luxurious one. Being seated on swings is both the means of becoming identified with divinities (especially the mother goddess) and a sign of this identity – the divinities are represented in this way, for instance, in the lost-wax sculptures for which Bastar is famous. The swing participates in the mechanics of trance-induction, as I have discussed elsewhere (Gell 1980). Mortals become the 'horses' of the divinities by losing their normal sense of physical selfhood, and through succumbing to religious vertigo. Insensibility to pain and fatigue demonstrate possession; tribal and lower-caste shamans swing on seats of thorns or nails, beat themselves with ropes and chains, and so on. This self-torture applies only to the 'horse' or vehicle of the divinity, and indicates the hierarchical gulf between the low-status shaman and the high-status divinity 'riding' him or her, comparable to the thrashings administered by humans to animal beasts of burden.

The divinities riding on swings do so because vertiginous pleasures are intrinsic to divine sensibility as imagined by the tribals. Riding, on horses, or elephants, or tigers, or Rath-chariots, or swings, involves elevation from the unmoving earth, to which ordinary mortals remain firmly attached, and a giddy, swaying motion. This is not torture, but pleasure and ease (rocking in the cradle) though in a form which cancels the secure rootedness from which the tribals draw their sense of security in the middle world, and which in their station they may experience only vicariously. We may therefore draw a contrast between the girl-shaman, who is possessed as the vehicle of Danteshwari, on a swing of thorns and the Raja who, more nearly 'is' Danteshwari, on her swing of un-mixed (but inaccessible) pleasure. The doubling-up of the mechanisms of divine vertigo exhibits the redundancy of the code; the Raja's swing, inducing vertigo, was itself mounted on the vertiginous tottering chariot, 20 ft tall, borne along by a teeming multitude over which the rider in the chariot exercised no direct control. The Raja, during his apotheosis, had no need to enter a trance state, as lower-status shamans must. He was enraptured, transported, divinized,

through the mechanism of vertigo, which allowed him to embody divine sensibility unmediatedly rather than vicariously, like a shaman.

I see a parallelism therefore between the culminating phase of the first segment of Bastar Dasara, i.e. the arrival of Danteshwari in her palanquin, borne on the shoulders of her chief priest and the Raja, and the culminating phase of the second segment of Bastar Dasara, also a great 'entry into the capital', but on this occasion the role of 'bearers of the palanquin' is taken by the great mass of tribal people, and the role of Danteshwari in her swaying receptacle is taken by the Raja. In effect, the first segment of Dasara, in which the Raja enacts the role of devotee, is being replayed with the Raja in the 'goddess' position, and the people in the 'devotee' position. According to the logic of these substitutions, the implication arises that at this critical moment 'the people' are 'the Raja'. And it is on these slippages, between Goddess and Raja, and between Raja and people, that the structure of the kingdom of Bastar ultimately rested.

I break off the analysis of Bastar Dasara at this point in order to look at the situation from a different angle, the political one. May's account of Bastar Dasara in the 1911 census communicates in its subtext a certain sense of political crisis. Here was a kingdom with a notoriously ramshackle administration and no established military elite or well organized policing mechanisms, which every year subjected its capital to a vast influx of excitable, armed, tribal people in the grip of politico-religious effervescence motivated by forces well beyond the scope of civilized rationality. May mentions the Murias 'armed with bows and arrows who rush about amidst the crowd shrieking out their war cries', the vast numbers, the noise, the firing of the cannon and so forth. Speaking of 'war cries' in this connexion is, in fact, a significant misperception in that the Muria and the other tribes were not organized for 'war', did not recognize 'warrior' as a social role, and never did engage in 'tribal warfare' in any meaningful sense. Their 'arms' were hunting weapons and axes, rather than special-purpose man-killing weapons.

There was no real threat of civil disorder during the scenes in which Dasara culminated. Yet the mere numerousness, unity and exuberant self-confidence of the tribal people at this time surely impressed those charged with attempting to govern them. Suppose we occlude, for a moment, the Raja in his chariot and focus only upon the great stream of persons converging, amid thunderous noise, upon the capital: is there not something menacingly like a riot or rebellion here? And even if one allows the Raja to reappear, does it not seem equally like an uprising, though a loyalist one, in that the great mass of people, led by their ruler, are pressing forward against some countervailing power which they will overcome? This countervailing power, evoked yet largely effaced in the ritual, was 'the government', i.e. the Raja's Prime Minister, the British authorities who assumed the Prime Minister's function and title more and more completely, and latterly the governments in Bhopal and Delhi.

I would argue that the political significance of Dasara was that by elevating the Raja, the people of the state indirectly intimidated his government and checked the political will to rationalize the collection of revenue and the extension of state power. Needless to add, I cannot offer historical proof of this contention, but in support of this idea I would like briefly to draw out certain parallels between Dasara as a political ritual and the Bastar 'rebellions' of 1876,

1910, 1961 and 1966 (Sunder 1994). All these rebellions shared a common feature: they were ostensibly in support of the ruler (or a claimant, in the case of the 1910 rebellion) against the government, or after independence, the state and national governments. These great assemblies (i.e. 'rebellions') were called, by the tribals, *bhumkal* (Singh 1985: 146). Assemblies called *bhumkal* occur routinely in villages whenever collective issues have to be thrashed out. They are not intrinsically military affairs, but expressions of the solidarity of the *nar* (the autonomous village unit) presided over by the *siyan* (the elders, wise persons).

The unrest of 1876 was occasioned by the decision of the then ruler, Bhairondeo, accompanied by the Prime Minister, to meet the Prince of Wales, then paying a state visit to Agra. The tribal perception of this was that the (unpopular) Prime Minister was attempting to carry off the Raja. Large numbers of tribals congregated on the southern route out of the state, preventing the departure from Bastar soil of the Raja on whom its prosperity depended. Some were killed by the Prime Minister's soldiers, but the Raja was captured and confined within the palace for some weeks. The British political agent made haste to the scene and listened to the grievances against the Prime Minister voiced by the tribal spokesmen. There was no further bloodshed. He caused the unpopular ministers to be dismissed, and the Raja was allowed to resume his duties, without meeting the Prince of Wales. In these events, one is surely entitled to see a kind of mirroring of the 'capture' and 'restoration' of the Raja which took place during the culmination of Dasara; only here played out as a secular struggle over the person of the Raja and his confinement to the bosom of his people, rather than a ritual one.

The 1876 rebellion set a pattern whereby the British, who now had effective control of the Raja's government, tried to impress on his ministers the need to govern the country in a philanthropic spirit. However, trouble broke out again in 1910. Once again, the scenario consisted of the formation of an encampment around the capital. Only in this instance the trouble had been fomented not by the ruling Raja (who was controlled by the British) but by a would-be usurper, the Lal, the ruler's uncle, who promised the tribes that if he were placed on the throne he would remove the Prime Minister and the government. Following Grigson (1938), historians of these events have believed that at the root of the 1910 rebellion lay the problem of forest reservation by the crown, which restricted the access of the tribals to their traditional resource-base. One should not imagine that the tribals were, in 1910 or later, actually interested in making money out of forestry operations, a capitalist enterprise completely foreign to their way of life. In practice, reservation threatened their practice of unrestricted shifting agriculture, which was itself a defensive adaptation to the state system, in that it is near-impossible to raise land-revenue from cultivators whose fields look like wastelands and which are abandoned after one or two seasons.

My presumption is that the tribals' worries about crown forest reservation in 1910 was that it involved the prospect of harsher taxation and more effective landlordism, which cannot take hold when shifting agriculture is permitted to take place freely. 1910 was a pre-emptive strike against administration as such, rather than because the tribes 'needed' their forest land in order to subsist.

Once again, the 1910 rebellion seems to echo the format of Dasara, though perhaps less closely than before. The key elements were nevertheless in place,

namely the besieging of Jagdalpur by thousands of tribals, headed by one whom they regarded as their divine ruler, in opposition to the Prime Minister's government. The unpopular Prime Minister was removed from office in the aftermath of the rebellion, which was quickly crushed once government forces arrived from Raipur. The schoolmasters, whose abrupt appearance in many villages (demanding material support and school attendance) had precipitated much tribal hostility, were also withdrawn and soon calm was restored.

This calm lasted a long time and from the pages of Grigson (1938) and Elwin (1947), Bastar's pre-war ethnographers, one can see that a *modus vivendi* was established between the ruler, the British government and the tribal people, which allowed the latter to flourish and do what they had always done best, i.e. avoid creating surplus value for the state or any ruling class. The minimal bloodshed of 1876 and 1910 purchased for the tribal population the privileges of backwardness; in other words the enjoyment of under-productive leisure, local autonomy, and sensuality. Of course, this resistance of the tribes against the forces of modernity was only relatively successful since gradual encroachment of the state over the tribal hinterland was an irresistible trend. But I like to think that the shock to the administrative system produced by the rebellions of 1876 and 1910, tending to make the government adopt a gently-as-she-goes approach, was annually reinforced at Dasara, since each performance, involving as it did a besieging of the capital by the multitude in the sway of evidently irrational passions, must have given notice to the government that they were dealing with combustible material.

Under British control, Bastar remained a power vacuum, relatively speaking, just as it had been before. After independence this state of affairs began to break down. Bastar was not among the princely states recognized by the union, and became merged with Madhya Pradesh, an alteration incomprehensible to most of its citizens but deeply offensive to the ruler, Pravir. In 1953 the ex-ruler was deprived of his property on the grounds of mental instability. To recover his property from the Court of Wards, Pravir turned Congressman and was elected in the 1950s as a Congress parliamentarian, with massive tribal support. But he was disappointed, and became a bitter opponent of the Nehru regime. He was arrested, imprisoned and formally deposed as Raja in 1961. But so far as the people were concerned, Pravir was still their Raja. Tribal dissatisfaction with the incarceration of the Raja led to the rebellion of March 1961, during which an armed mob attacked police who were supposedly holding the Raja in the police lock-up at Lohandiguda (in South Bastar) though he was actually being held hundreds of miles away, at Narsinghpur. There were echoes of the 1876 rebellion in the unrest of 1961 in that both centred on 'releasing the Raja from captivity', or, to put it another way, recapturing him for the people. In this respect, too, the 1961 events recapitulated the Dasara scenario.

Shortly after the 1961 events, the ex-ruler was indeed released from jail and returned to Jagdalpur, where he uneasily shared the palace with his brother, no longer ruler in even name and not able to ride on the *rath* chariot (where his place was symbolically taken by the umbrella of Danteshwari) but still in position in the mystical sense. More demonstrations on his behalf continued intermittently for the next few years, and were successful in the sense that eventually control of his property was restored to him by the court of wards.

However, by this time the Raja (who firmly believed in his own divinity) was becoming fatally ambitious, having been resoundingly victorious in the elections as an independent candidate on a platform of support for tribal interests. The crunch came in 1966 when, as a result of famine in other parts of India, the government proposed to make a levy of rice from the Bastar cultivators (whose harvests had been satisfactory). The plan of the government to levy rice in Bastar reflects the fact that, despite its reputation for extreme poverty, Bastar district produces rice surpluses year after year and can more than feed its own people. However, there is extreme local resistance, especially among tribals, to allowing rice produced in the village to go to market or be subjected to a levy in the way the government proposed. This attitude is founded on the idea that if rice leaves the village the divinities responsible for the fertility and productivity of the village land will be angered, and future harvests will diminish. In a way, this conservationist attitude to rice is only another aspect of the proprietary attitude of the tribals towards their ruler (who should not leave the kingdom just as rice should not leave the village). The Raja's campaign against the rice levy was therefore symbolically over-determined from the tribals point of view, and their resentment became greatly inflamed.

The Raja made inflammatory speeches on this subject, and large numbers of people congregated at the palace and refused to disperse. Two clashes occurred at the palace between tribal demonstrators and police. During the second of these, the Raja, who may actually have been attempting to restrain his supporters, was shot and killed. According to the official report, twelve tribals died as the police swept the palace compound with rifle fire, though tribals and local residents believe that the number was vastly greater than this. Thus perished the Raja of Bastar amidst his people, and the Bastar power-vacuum was finally eliminated by the armed might of a modern state.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that Bastar Dasara was that anthropological staple, a 'ritual of rebellion', but of a strange and paradoxical kind, in that its ostensible objective was the celestialization of royal power. But this paradoxical strategy, exalting the king in order to weaken the state, was perhaps the only one really open to the people of Bastar for whom, like the rest of India, a state *of some kind* was an ontological given, like food, light and air, not an arbitrary historical imposition. By co-opting royal ritual and enmeshing the ruler in coercive subordination, the people had, first of all, a sanctioned occasion for annual demonstrations, within sight of the capital and the government, of their unity and armed strength, and secondly a basis for 'loyal' anti-government agitation. The peace of Bastar, during the British period, rested on the willingness of the government to align itself with the Raja, who in turn aligned himself with the tribal people, to the detriment of political and social modernization, which was kept at bay for a long time. When this triadic relationship was disturbed, there would be 'loyalist' rebellions which converted the Dasara scheme into popular expressions of intransigence of a more transparent kind. But I hope that I have demonstrated that Bastar Dasara was indeed subversive in that it tended to mitigate the possibility of rational state administration and the development of a rural ruling class for a prolonged period, to the substantial

benefit of the mass of rural Bastarians. In other words, royal ritual is not necessarily about enhancing the power of rulers and elites to the detriment of the ruled. In the case of Bastar, I believe that it was precisely the opposite.

NOTES

¹ The best general account of tribal society in India is provided by Singh (1985), to whom this article owes far more than may be superficially apparent. The discussion by Beteille (1991) is also very important.

² The untrammelled life-style of the north Bastar Gonds in their pre-independence heyday is described in the work of Elwin (1947). In the 70s and early 80s, when, with Simeran Gell, I worked in north-central Bastar myself, the situation was in many respects unchanged.

³ The best descriptions of Bastar Dasara are the one in the 1911 Census of India and, secondly, a detailed account tucked away in an article by Majumdar (1939) of Dasara as performed in the 1930s, before the storm broke over the head of the last ruler, Pravir.

⁴ Currently, it seems that tribal people are not prepared to accept that the goddess 'Danteshwari' is the Hindus' Durga, since this proposition was explicitly denied by Jaidev Baghel, celebrated artist and spokesman of contemporary tribal opinion, in conversation with Gregory, who has written most interestingly on this subject. Gregory, in his unpublished manuscript (Gregory, n.d.) cites Baghel's version of the story of Danteshwari in which the goddess appears as a tribal girl born to a human couple, but supernatural in possessing, from birth, a full set of teeth (a mytheme based on the association between Danteshwari and *dant* – meaning 'tooth' in Hindi/Halbi). Danteshwari in Baghel's 'tribal' perspective is Durga-like in having a special affinity for tigers (replacing Durga's lion) and in being of a violent disposition, protective of her followers and banishing illness and inauspiciousness generally. The tribal Danteshwari is clearly not Durga, the standard Indian goddess. On the other hand, I do not think that the crowds at Dasara thought that the Raja (never considered to be a tribal by the tribals themselves) was sacrificing to a deified tribal girl rather than his own deity; our own conversations with Murias on the subject of Danteshwari suggested that she was thought of as like the local goddess, but much bigger and more powerful, and that only a Raja, nearer to her in social status, could conduct sacrifices to her. Did the Raja undertake the 'Hinduization' of the local goddess(es) in order to legitimate his rule; or did the tribal people 'tribalize' Durga, or rather the cult of Durga in her Danteshwari form, in order to bind the ruler to them, and thus create the power vacuum of which I have spoken? These are complementary, rather than alternative, propositions and one is in no way obliged to choose between them. However, the second proposition is perhaps the more novel, and this is the line I will pursue in describing the cult.

⁵ There were actually two chariots, one big one and one smaller one, used on alternate days. The chariots were made for each annual performance of wood contributed by specific villages, which was later auctioned off.

⁶ Schnepel (in press) provides an excellent account of Jeypore Dasara. He examines the subject from the Raja's and the court's point of view, rather than the tribals'. He, like me, places great stress on the very large and turbulent crowds which attended Dasara in this neighbouring state, though he does not draw the implication that the authorities were actually subject to intimidation at this time, as I do. He cites a number of descriptions of Jeypore Dasara, but does not mention the data from Fawcett published by Croke (1915) which I cite above.

⁷ I owe the ideas expressed in these paragraphs to Fuller (1992 and pers. comm. 1996). He is not, of course, responsible for any remaining misconceptions on my part.

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Exaltation du roi et obstruction de l'état: une interprétation politique du rituel royal dans le district de Bastar en Inde Centrale

Résumé

Cet article offre une interprétation du tribalisme en Inde péninsulaire, fondée sur les caractéristiques politiques et économiques des royaumes 'tribaux' présidés par des rois 'hindous'. Ces royaumes étaient ostensiblement égalitaires, avec une relation relativement directe entre le souverain et ses sujets tribaux sans la médiation des rangs officiels qui caractérisaient les royaumes voisins hindous et musulmans. Une explication typique de ce phénomène a été donnée en termes de conséquences évolutionnelles et historiques du 'primitivisme' renforcées par l'isolement physique et l'application de critères exclusionnistes par la société hindoue. En contraste, cet article soutient que les sujets tribaux ont eu bien davantage le dessus dans la négociation de leur statut qu'il ne l'était supposé jusqu'à présent et il fait recours au concept de 'subordination coercive' d'Appadurai pour réexaminer les relations entre les sociétés hindoues et tribales. En actualisant une image d'eux-mêmes comme primitifs de la forêt, instables, les sujets tribaux pouvaient se maintenir relativement libres de l'interférence estatale et entraver le développement d'institutions destinées à extraire leur revenu. De la sorte ils assuraient que l'état exerce une fonction séculaire faible tout en étant exalté dans ses fonctions ritualistes. Cette démonstration est fondée sur l'analyse du symbolisme du rituel annuel de Dasara dans le vieux royaume de Bastar, au cours duquel le roi hindou est soumis à une 'abduction' par la populace tribale avant d'être confirmé comme roi divin. Ces rituels suggèrent qu'une interprétation nouvelle soit donnée aux soit-disant rébellions tribales de 1876, 1910 et 1961 dans le royaume de Bastar.

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